

HEALTH AND SAFETY IN SCHOOLS

A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

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HEALTH AND SAFETY - A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Health and Safety legislation affects every single worker and pupil in every school - all users of school and college premises are covered by the Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978.

All schools should have a Safety Committee to oversee Health and Safety in the school - each Union in school should appoint a Representative, although in small schools the unions may decide to appoint a joint Rep.

The full duties of the Rep can be found both on the UTU website and in the School Reps' handbook.

Briefly, these duties are:

- To investigate potential hazards and examine the cause of accidents.
- To investigate complaints by colleagues.
- To make representations to employers on matters of concern.
- To carry out inspections of the premises.
- To represent colleagues in consultations on Health and Safety issues.

Safety reps are entitled to some time off with pay to carry out their duties - a guideline would be in small schools, half a day per term for inspections and a full day in large schools. For routine duties, one hour per week in small schools and two hours in

large schools. Time off is not dependent on funding and should be written into a teacher's timetable in the same way as time allowed for other responsibilities.

The Safety Rep is not in any way legally responsible for hazards that are pointed out but not acted upon or for unseen hazards.

This booklet will give information on some basic Health and Safety in schools - further information is available on the UTU website, the School Reps' Handbook and by calling the UTU Office.

SCHOOL JOURNEYS

School visits are of great educational and social value for young people, teachers must, however, ensure that the highest standards of Health and Safety are applied at all stages. Teachers should also be aware of the potential for stress involved in planning and organising trips and decide whether it is essential to become involved.

The law expects that a teacher will apply the same care that he/she would for his/her own family and that supervision of pupils throughout the journey is maintained at all times. Teachers must take all reasonable steps to avoid exposing children to dangers which are foreseeable and beyond what certain pupils can be expected to cope with.

No teacher should be expected to organise a trip without either training or guidance from colleagues who have had previous experience. The organiser should, wherever possible, make a preliminary visit to the proposed destination, become familiar with activities to be carried out and assess possible hazards.

Staffing should be based on the age, sex and ability of the pupils - guidelines are:

- 1 adult per 6 pupils in years 1 - 3 (pre-school a higher ratio).
- 1 adult per 10-15 in years 4-6.

- 1 adult per 15-20 in year 7 onwards.

These are the bare minimum - the ratio should always be higher if possible and definitely higher for trips abroad (teachers planning trips abroad should check the supervision ratios for that country - not for this country!) and for hazardous activities. Specialist activities such as swimming, hill walking, climbing, sailing etc., should only take place when accompanied by qualified instructors.

Parents should always be asked to sign a consent form early in the planning stages and should be made completely aware of the nature of the activity.

Every effort should be made to include all pupils regardless of ability. Disability legislation requires "reasonable adjustments" to be investigated to enable the participation of pupils with disabilities. Teachers may, however, decide to exclude a pupil whose poor behaviour may constitute a safety risk.

Further information available from the UTU.

ADMINISTRATION OF MEDICINES

There is no legal or contractual duty on teachers to administer medicine. It is purely voluntary and should never be undertaken without training or if the medicine requires technical medical knowledge. Although teachers have a duty to safeguard the Health and Safety of the children in their care, this does not include the administration of medicines.

Schools should have a clear policy on medicines and an individual health care plan for each child who requires medication. If medication is required during the day some pupils may be able to self-administer, otherwise arrangements should be made with the parents and/or medical staff.

Teachers should never administer non-prescribed medicines.

Only prescribed medicines should be brought into school, they should be held in a safe place and in a safe container - neither should be accessible to other pupils.

Medicines for emergency treatment (epipens, inhalers etc) should not be kept in a locked cupboard but be accessible to those who need them. In the case of anaphylactic reaction teachers may

choose to use the epipen - (it is safe and impossible to administer an overdose) but are under no obligation to do so. Ambulances must be summoned in all emergency situations.

First Aid - There is no absolute requirement to have a First Aider in a school, there must, however, be an "Appointed Person" who is not necessarily trained in first aid but takes overall control of the First Aid equipment, knows the emergency procedures to summon an ambulance and to report accidents.

Teachers cannot be required to be a first aider unless it is contractual. Whether voluntary or contractual a first aider must be trained. A teacher should think carefully before volunteering to become a first aider,(eg: Teachers of practical subjects or PE could rarely leave their classes unsupervised).

A first aider should be released from classes occasionally to fulfil their duties to maintain equipment.

In an emergency it is generally better for teachers to offer some sort of first aid than to leave the child.

Further information from the UTU.

ACCIDENTS AND REPORTING ACCIDENTS

It is essential that all accidents are reported and investigated so that hazards may be eliminated in future.

All accidents, however trivial, should be recorded - injuries which may seem trivial at the time may have more serious long-term consequences. It is a legal requirement to record accidents in the workplace where ten people or more are employed (even in the smallest schools when lunchtime supervisors, classroom assistants and admin staff are counted, this will be ten staff!).

For teachers suffering an accident it is advisable to make a precautionary visit to the GP and record the accident, take photographs of the injury and the place the injury took place. If there should be a claim for compensation, these will be of great help.

Assaults on teachers both physical and verbal (stress can be an industrial accident) should also be recorded in the same way as accidents.

"Near miss" accidents should be reported as this will allow appropriate action to be taken. Falling

roof tiles, uneven paving, carpets not secure could all be “near miss” accidents.

Following an accident the employer should investigate the cause and take steps to ensure it does not happen again. Union Safety Reps have a legal right to inspect the site of an accident and make recommendations.

If the accident to a UTU member is serious, the member should contact Headquarters for advice and assistance. A member should also contact Headquarters if remedial action is not taken following an accident.

Playground accidents to pupils due to slips, trips or falls are not reportable other than to be recorded in the school's accident book unless the accident requires professional medical care or it arose in connection with construction work on the school site, because of the condition of the premises or because of the level of supervision.

Further information from UTU

MATERNITY AND NEW MOTHERS

As soon as a teacher has informed her employer of her pregnancy then a risk assessment should be carried out to ensure the safety of both her and the unborn child. The following areas should be considered:

- Has the issue of fatigue been addressed - classes/duties may be re-allocated, attendance at evening meetings may be suspended, cover of classes with disruptive pupils may not be required.
- Is there somewhere to lie down, if necessary?
- Is classroom seating appropriate? (teachers should not be required to use child sized seating).
- Has she been offered help with lifting/carrying?
- Is there any possibility that she has been exposed to rubella, if so has she been advised to see her GP?
- In practical subjects have measures been taken to protect her from chemicals/solvents/cleaning agents?
- Where a child or children could be disruptive, is she protected from them?

During pregnancy, other diseases (Chickenpox, Parvovirus, Cytomegalovirus and, in rural areas, Chlamydia Psittaci, caught from sheep) can be a risk to the mother and unborn child. In all cases the pregnant teacher should be aware of the risk and should seek medical advice if exposure is suspected.

After giving birth, especially after returning from a short maternity leave, a teacher should still be provided with proper seating, rest place and, if necessary, a place to express and store milk. If a teacher is returning following a Caesarean birth, then care should be given to lifting, carrying and standing for excessive time.

Toilet provision is particularly important, briefly the guidelines are that there should be one toilet and washroom (a lockable room with toilet and washbasin) for a premises with 1 - 5 employees, 2 toilets and washrooms for 6 - 25 employees and 3 for establishments of 26 - 50.

Female and male employees should have their own toilet provision unless all facilities are of the washroom type. These facilities should be separate from those used by pupils the only exception being disabled facilities which may be used by teachers, staff, pupils and visitors as necessary.

More information from UTU.

SOME OTHER CONCERNS IN BRIEF

Heating - The guideline minimum temperatures for school premises are - 18 degrees C for classrooms, 15 degrees for rooms where physical activity takes place and 21 degrees for sick bays.

It is in the power of Principals to close all or part of a school if these temperatures are not met but parents have to be notified. In the event of long-standing problems, the Safety Rep should ascertain what remedial action is being taken.

Swimming - Unless the services of a qualified lifeguard are used, non-specialist teachers of swimming should possess, at least, a current lifesaving qualification and a basic swimming teaching qualification. Teachers should not be expected to take on activities which expose themselves, or their pupils, to undue risk.

Teachers' Vehicles -Even if a teacher should have adequate insurance, he/she cannot be directed to carry pupils in his/her own vehicle.

There are quite specific rules on insurance of vehicles for "business use" (driving to INSET training, driving between schools or sites, driving to work-related meetings, undertaking duties as a union officer etc) - check carefully with your insurer to make sure you are covered.

There is no automatic right to park on school premises and teachers must be aware that there is little likelihood of receiving compensation if their vehicle is damaged on school property - parking is at the teachers' own risk.

Lifting and Handling -The lifting and/or handling of heavy loads or even of pupils (unless in an emergency situation) is not part of a teacher's role. Whereas teachers will be expected to carry light loads as part of everyday work, heavy loads should be the responsibility of premises staff or other contracted staff. A teacher should not lift or carry a load which could cause injury. Furthermore, teachers who are pregnant or who have a disability should have special consideration paid to them.

Asbestos - The presence of asbestos in schools is an ongoing concern, the law requires action to be taken to identify and deal with suspected asbestos. It is still present in some pipe and boiler laggings, wall spaces, ceiling and wall panels and in some science labs. If you suspect there is asbestos in your school the Safety rep should seek guidance on how it is to be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

This leaflet is intended as a brief guide only to Health and Safety issues in school. There are staff at UTU Headquarters to give more detailed advice and guidance on any of the topics included or in the many that are not, for example:

- **Risk assessments**
- **Safety during Construction Work**
- **Safety Inspections**
- **Stress**
- **Security and Violence**
- **Fire Safety**
- **Emergency Procedures**
- **Work Equipment**
- **Computers**
- **Practical lessons**
- **Electrical Safety**
- **Voice and Eye Care**
- **Infectious Diseases**
- **Use and Abuse of Mobile Phones**

Also look out for Health and Safety issues on the UTU website, in the School Reps' Handbook and for training offered by the UTU.

